UNITED NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1992/NGO/6
17 June 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1992
29 June-31 July 1992
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

Prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and programmes addressed to the mitigation of its negative socio-economic consequences

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

* * *

## The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the global fight against AIDS

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, representing the 150 Red Cross and Red Crescent societies around the world, has traditionally been actively engaged in the struggle to improve health and protect human rights. The global epidemic of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) clearly represents a challenge in which the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies have an active and important role.

---

* E/1992/100.

Before reviewing specific actions undertaken by the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, it is useful to consider the philosophic, organizational and practical reasons for the Red Cross/Red Crescent's being well placed to serve a useful role in community, national and global efforts against this new pandemic.

First, it is vital that long-standing, respected non-governmental organizations become actively engaged in AIDS work. AIDS service organizations and other non-governmental organizations dedicated exclusively to AIDS prevention and care have made extremely important and creative contributions. Nevertheless, the long experience and the ability to ensure sustainability of projects and commitments characteristic of the Red Cross help ensure that AIDS work is not considered a marginal or temporary problem.

Second, the Red Cross is fundamentally a movement of communities linked by the dedication to common ideals and action. The strong community orientation of the Red Cross strengthens its ability to mobilize community support and action in favour of HIV prevention, AIDS care and protection of human rights and dignity.

Third, the linkage of national societies around the world within the Red Cross movement has fostered exchange of information, training opportunities and a pattern of global learning and sharing, which is so important in the work against HIV/AIDS. The sharing of resources and experience on AIDS among national societies combines the advantages of local and national specificity and creativity with international collaboration and solidarity.

Finally, respect for the guiding principles of the Red Cross movement requires that the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies become actively engaged in the protection of human rights and dignity, which has been recognized as central to an effective fight against AIDS.

Therefore, as a respected, long-standing, truly international non-governmental organization, the Red Cross/Red Crescent has undertaken a series of specific actions, in close collaboration with national Governments, intergovernmental organizations of the United Nations and other international non-governmental organizations.

Our principal lines of work have occurred in five areas. First, the International Federation has taken a strong position against AIDS-related discrimination, at the national and international levels. The clear statement of principles regarding the importance of respecting human rights and promoting human dignity in relation to HIV/AIDS had already been expressed in the resolution adopted by the Federation General Assembly in Rio in 1987 and reinforced by the decision adopted by the Federation General Assembly in Budapest in 1991. As just one example of national level work, the Thai Red Cross played a very important role in helping to advocate adoption of non-discriminatory AIDS-related legislation in Thailand.

Second, national societies have been actively involved in developing information and education programmes for a wide variety of target audiences. In many cases, Red Cross societies were the pioneers, developing the first country-specific information and education programmes.

Third, our national societies have identified education and support of youth as a high priority for Red Cross/Red Crescent work against AIDS. Accordingly, a special project on youth and AIDS called "Action for Youth" was created, based on the principle of peer education. This project has been developed in Europe, Africa and Latin America and will soon be extended to Asia.

Fourth, it was clear to the Red Cross/Red Crescent that while effective prevention was critically important, literally millions of women, men and children around the world would require counselling and care during the years to come. The recent projections of the Global AIDS Policy Coalition suggest that by the year 2000 24 million adults may have developed AIDS, along with millions of children; from 1992 to 1995 alone, the number of children orphaned by AIDS is expected to more than double, from 1.8 million today to 3.7 million in three years. Therefore, the Red Cross/Red Crescent has developed a strong care and counselling component, again with particular attention to local needs and capacities.

Finally, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, through its national societies and with the coordination of the International Federation AIDS Programme in Geneva, has worked actively to link efforts around the world, learn from successful community programmes, prevent isolation of any community or nation, enhance exchange of information and provide practical guidance to the many societies and thousands of volunteers whose work is the basis of the Red Cross movement.

The challenge of AIDS is enormous, but for the reasons mentioned above, it was clear from the start that the Red Cross movement would become an active participant in the new global struggle. In fact, more national societies are engaged in AIDS work than in any other single programme coordinated through our Federation offices in Geneva.

Yet the work to date is only the beginning. At the basis of the Red Cross movement is an understanding of health that is linked with humanitarian ideals, but also with social, economic and political realities. It is clear that in confronting AIDS, we must all be vigilant to prevent complacency and denial. Several expert organizations, such as the World Health Organization's Global Programme on AIDS and the aforementioned Global AIDS Policy Coalition, have warned that the global epidemic remains dynamic and that the major impacts of AIDS are yet to come. For this reason, we believe that the WHO Global AIDS Strategy must be continuously renewed and revised as needed, to ensure that it does not inadvertently underestimate either the pandemic or what will be needed to work effectively against it. This approach has been strongly reiterated in decision 31, adopted by the Federation General Assembly in Budapest in November 1991, reinforcing past Red Cross/Red Crescent statements and resolutions.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent is one of the largest international non-governmental organizations working in AIDS. We are working to ensure that the Red Cross/Red Crescent contributions to community, national and global AIDS prevention and care are productive, forward-looking and adapted both to local realities and to global perspectives. We consider ourselves to be a partner, with the United Nations system, national Governments and many other groups, in a global effort whose failure we refuse to consider, yet whose success will require much of us all. The strength of our movement is based on the power of our guiding principles: they are once again being tested, showing their relevance and usefully leading our work against this new global threat to health.

---